Archaeologists have discovered a mass grave of Jews killed by Romanian troops during World War II, the Elie Wiesel Institute said on Friday.

Quoting witnesses, the institute said more than 100 Jews – men, women, children, and elderly people – were buried at the newly discovered site in a forest area near Popricani, close to the city of Iasi, in northeast Romania.

"One of the witnesses saw the shooting of the Jews because the soldiers thought that he himself was Jewish and intended to also shoot him," the Elie Wiesel Institute's Romanian branch said in a statement. "He was spared only when the soldiers were convinced that he was Christian Orthodox."

An international commission headed by Nobel laureate Wiesel said in 2004 that between 280,000 and 380,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews were killed in Romania and areas it controlled during World War II as an ally of Nazi Germany.

Many of Jews were slaughtered in pogroms such as the 1941 killing of almost 15,000 Jews in Iasi, or died in labor camps, or on death trains.

The Elie Wiesel Institute said the grave site was in an area through which Romanian and German troops advanced at the start of their invasion of the Soviet Union.

Archaeologists digging in a forest area called Vulturi, have so far unearthed 16 bodies, Romanian prosecutors said, adding that they had launched an investigation.

Vulturi is the second place in Romania where a mass grave has been discovered since the war. In 1945, 311 bodies from three mass graves were exhumed in Stanca Roznovanu in Iasi.

Adrian Cioflanca, coordinator of archaeological works at Vulturi said the victims were executed by Regiment 6, Mountain Rangers, which he said was also involved in massacres in what is now the neighboring Republic of Moldova.

Romania has only recently started to come to terms with its role in the extermination of Jews, admitting for the first time in 2003 that it took part.

After Romania switched sides in the war in 1944, communist regimes did little to uncover the killings while nationalist governments after 1989 also kept them under wraps.

Romania was home to 750,000 Jews before the war, but only 8,000-10,000 remain.